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ABSTRACT

In recent years, an emphasis has been placed on making the transfer process more effective and ensuring that all students are able to complete a Bachelor's degree. The Transfer Education Commission of the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer (NCAAT), for example, has issued an agenda that identifies academic practices and policy decisions that should be addressed in articulation efforts between two and four-year institutions to improve transfer success. The NCAAT agenda consists of the following nine key points: (1) establish a firm institutional commitment to transfer; (2) enrich the connection between teaching and transfer; (3) revitalize academic relationships between institutions; (4) manage transfer more effectively; (5) identify and realize transfer goals; (6) inform students fully; (7) issue a clear public call for improved transfer; (8) acknowledge the importance of financial support; and (9) establish firm expectations of transfer success. Other researchers have identified emerging national trends in transfer models, including an awareness of the value of articulation partnerships, communication and collaboration between faculty from two-year and four-year colleges, academic partnerships, and an emphasis on math and science competencies. Strategies identified in the literature for improving transfer effectiveness include creating formal articulation agreements, providing active student support services, undertaking curriculum reform to strengthen the collegiate nature of community college curricula, and encouraging faculty collaboration with the articulation process. The NCAAT agenda is appended. (TGI)

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Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education
Briefing Paper, Number 4, Spring 1994

Georgia State Department of Education, Atlanta
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GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TECHNICAL AND ADULT EDUCATION

BRIEFING PAPER

HOW TO MAKE TRANSFER WORK: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

Occupational Research Group

No. 4, Spring 1994

In recent years, various groups in higher education have addressed concerns about how to make the transfer process for students more effective and how to assure that more students who enter higher education through the community/two-year college/technical institute are able to complete the bachelor's degree. One of these groups, the Transfer Education Commission of the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer, has issued a "National Agenda for Academic Achievement and Transfer" (NCAAT, 1991). Their recommendations identify academic practices and policy decisions that should be addressed in articulation efforts between two- and four-year institutions of higher education to impact transfer success. The preamble to their agenda summarizes the importance of transfer:

> ...we as a nation rely heavily on our higher education system to unlock the doors of opportunity, to foster equity, to promote success, and to encourage advancement for the full range of citizens....America's community colleges in particular embody our hopes for the future. For millions of students, they are the entry point to higher education and thus serve as the avenue to intellectual and economic growth. Entry to four-year colleges or universities by community college students, i.e., transfer, is central to the realization of equal opportunity in education. Community colleges and universities must strengthen their curricular and instructional links so that qualified students can transfer easily, routinely, with full expectation of success upon transfer. (p.1)

Their nine-point national agenda is provided at the end of this paper.

Donovan (1992) has studied successful models of transfer. He identifies the following emerging national trends:

* Awareness of the value of articulation partnership is increasing, and more colleges are committing time, expertise, and funding for transfer projects
* Periodic, ongoing, face-to-face meetings between faculty at two- and four-year colleges are increasingly common and are recognized as essential in course equivalency decisions and collaborative program planning
* Academic partnerships are expanding to include more institutions at all levels of education, validating the concept of a "seamless education"
* Articulation is placing increasing emphasis on math and science competencies, in response to national concerns

Strategies identified in the higher education transfer literature for improving transfer effectiveness include , the following:

1.) Articulation Agreements
2.) Student Support Services
3.) Curriculum Reform and Revision
4.) Faculty Collaboration

Each of these will be discussed in the sections which follow. The term "two-year colleges" used throughout this paper includes community colleges, junior colleges, technical institutes, and other postsecondary occupational schools awarding the associate degree.

Articulation Agreements

Formal articulation agreements identify the types of course credits that transfer and the conditions under which transfer takes place. They provide direction and assurance of credit transfer to four-year colleges for students who complete appropriate coursework at two-year institutions, and they address interinstitutional barriers to transfer, including institutional autonomy and the right of the respective institutions to set their own degree requirements. Truly cooperative efforts are needed to balance institutional prerogative and student needs, not simply list community college or technical school classes for which four-year institutions will grant credit. The actual impact of articulation agreements on student transfer has not been documented and may depend on the extent of genuine commitment to transfer among the institutions involved (Palmer & Eaton, 1991).

Articulation can involve mandated and voluntary statewide agreements as well as interinstitutional or departmental level agreements. The results of articulation activities between institutions typically include development of transfer guides and listings of equivalent courses, identification of four-year college expectations and requirements for transfer in general or for specific programs/majors, and admission information needed by students, including dual or joint admission arrangements. Development of computer-supported information systems and articulation databases helps to maintain complete and up-to-date information about agreements (Berman et al, 1990). Researchers who have examined effective transfer practices emphasize the importance of faculty and support staff involvement in the development of articulation agreements, in addition to the support and commitment of senior administration (Donovan et al, 1987; Prager, 1988; Berman et al, 1990; Knoell, 1990; NCAAT, 1991). Ongoing review and updating of formal articulation agreements is also considered important to effective transfer (Berman et al, 1990).

Student Support Services

Articulation agreements that address interinstitutional barriers have little effect unless prospective transfer students are aware of the information and plan their studies accordingly. Information about transfer opportunities and requirements is necessary for two-year college students to advance through the curricular and procedural barriers to continuing higher education (Palmer & Eaton, 1991). This information can be provided passively through printed or on-line course equivalency guides, transfer brochures, and other publications. Active support includes personal contact with students through centralized transfer centers and counselors, academic support and advising for transfer, and personal and career counseling services (Berman et al, 1990). In addition, two-year colleges need to assess student skills at entrance, require remediation where necessary, enforce course prerequisites, and monitor student progress. (Palmer & Eaton, 1991).

Efforts to increase students' level of aspiration and motivation to continue their education is important for two-year college students who often have short-term goals and little confidence in their academic abilities (Knoell, 1990). Grubb (1992) suggests that transfer can be enhanced through providing a.) initial assessment and counseling, b.) remediation linked to both academic and occupational programs, c.) emphasis on a

coherent sequence of study, d) monitoring and follow-up on student progress, e.) placement and transfer centers, and f.) improved preparation through tech prep programs.

Curriculum Reform and Revision

Curriculum development efforts frequently involve reexamination and strengthening the collegiate nature of two-year college curricula to assure that students have the necessary academic knowledge and skills to succeed in upper division coursework.

Eaton's (1990) Academic Model of Transfer Education emphasizes changes in campus-based academic practices to improve transfer. She proposes collaborative revision to curriculum objectives, classroom teaching, and expectations of student performance conducted jointly by both two- and four-year faculty. This model stresses curriculum building and pedagogy development as key points of intervention, along with a reexamination of the administrative support and institutional culture as it impacts transfer opportunity. In her model, curriculum development becomes a shared, joint enterprise between the faculty at two- and four-year colleges, rather than a reaction to (or against) separately development programs at each institution. This assures that two-year college students will engage in learning activities at the two-year level that will be of greatest benefit in a four-year setting, and builds professional relationships between faculty and institutions to facilitate student transfer.

Particular attention needs to be given to curriculum design and revision for two-year college occupational-technical programs to acknowledge the growing reality of transfer in career as well as liberal arts areas (Knoell, 1990).

Little information is available in national studies about transfer of career-track students, except that the number and percentage of students transferring with occupational-technical degrees have increased in recent years. Prager (1988) discusses articulation efforts for postsecondary vocational students. One approach is the "contract major," an individualized program of study designed for career-track transfer students at the School of Technical Careers at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. Another is the "capstone" programs, such as that at Wayne State University, which accept technical degrees into a Bachelor of General Studies curriculum. The 2 + 2 program model allows students to move from two-year occupational degrees into four-year degree programs in specialized fields without repeating previous coursework, following a fixed curriculum sequence (Prager, 1988). These programs are examples of four-year college curricula designed cooperatively to address specific concerns about the gap between occupational and liberal arts studies in transfer from two-year college.

Palmer and Eaton (1991) recommend replacing articulation agreements with educational partnerships that "provide students with curricular paths built on identified intellectual and skills competencies rather than on tentative lists of course equivalencies" (p.39). Traditional discussions about syllabi and credits would be replaced with substantive discussions of faculty expectations for student learning and the academic tasks students should be able to perform.

Faculty Collaboration

Transfer success is closely related to faculty commitment. Faculty shape student academic experiences and directly affect subsequent student success in upper-division courses. They are also key contacts with students on a daily basis and influence student transfer expectations through classroom and advisement interactions. Faculty involvement in institutional articulation is identified in the

literature as a critical factor in improving transfer effectiveness. Recommendations from research on articulation activities to improve transfer stress the importance of frequent, ongoing meetings between two- and four-year college faculty within and between departments (Donovan et al, 1987; Berman et al, 1990; Knoell, 1990; NCAAT, 1991).

Faculty, however, will need to reorient their thinking from "institutional" to "interinstitutional" when developing and revising curriculum expectations (Palmer & Eaton, 1991). By working collaboratively, two- and four-year faculty can view curriculum development as a shared activity that balances institutional autonomy prerogatives with student needs and interests. Faculty collaboration also leads to greater mutual trust between institution and a willingness to work jointly to eliminate barriers (Palmer & Eaton, 1991).

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A NINE-POINT NATIONAL AGENDA FOR ACTION

We Call Upon Two- And Four-Year Colleges To:

1. **Establish A Firm Institutional Commitment To Transfer.** Two- and four-year institutions should explicitly declare that transfer is an important institutional priority and that institutional investment in expanding academic achievement and transfer is essential. Presidents should issue direct, forceful written statements about the importance of transfer, about transfer as a central organizational value and priority, and about the institutional commitment to transfer goals.

2. **Enrich The Connection Between Teaching And Transfer.** Two- and four-year institutions should establish the primacy of faculty work with students and move to strengthen the relationship between teaching and transfer. Such an approach includes expanding the role and responsibility of classroom faculty in assisting students in decision making about transfer and in establishing clear transfer goals. Schools also should encourage the development of shared two-year/four-year faculty expectations about curricula and academic performance.

3. **Revitalize Academic Relationships Between Institutions.** Academic administrators and faculty at two- and four-year colleges should reinvest in the academic relationship between faculty and across academic departments. Particular attention should be paid to program coherence across institutions. Common expectations, academic achievement, the benefits of structured transfer programs, and needed transfer skills should be emphasized, and unique efforts by two- and four-year campuses—with their varying curricular contributions—should be respected and valued. Stressing these elements would lay the foundation for a new conversation between institutions.

4. **Manage Transfer More Effectively.** Two- and four-year campuses should focus significant attention on organizing their institutional operations to strengthen transfer: assigning responsibility and accountability for transfer activity to specific faculty, counselors, and administrators; and making available to students meaningful, comprehensive information about transfer.

5. **Identify And Realize Transfer Goals.** Two- and four-year institutions should make a major commitment to transfer effectiveness by establishing formal, written transfer goals and by creating an institutional information system that will generate the data necessary to assess the progress toward those goals, according to readily understandable definitions.

We Call Upon Institutional Governing Boards, Regional Accreditation Bodies, States, And The Nation To:

6. **Inform Students Fully.** Governing boards and accreditation agencies should require two- and four-year colleges alike to disclose public agreements on requirements for transfer and to accept courses at full faith and credit. Students themselves have a responsibility to select the curricular path that properly fits their aspirations. But that path must be made fully and clearly known to them, and it must be accessible.

7. **Issue A Clear Public Call For Improved Transfer.** Governing boards, states, and the federal government should proclaim clearly and firmly their ambitious and demanding expectations of student progress through transfer. Broad statements of public policy commitment to transfer are needed to support and encourage institutional efforts to increase the importance and effectiveness of transfer.

8. **Acknowledge The Importance Of Financial Support.** The lack of financial assistance must not be a barrier to transfer. Policymakers and officials should designate institutional and public funds to aid students who pursue transfer goals, whether by reallocating existing resources or by providing new funding. This financial support should be made widely available. Transfer students need to enjoy at least the same levels of assistance that are available to those who begin their college careers at four-year institutions.

9. **Establish Firm Expectations Of Transfer Success.** Accreditation agencies and governing boards must hold institutions accountable for transfer success—for making transfer happen. They should develop accreditation expectations and institutional policies that prompt institutions to: 1) assign high priority to effective transfer; 2) establish transfer goals; 3) maintain a clear policy commitment to the acceptance of transfer credits; 4) ensure the quality of the transfer experience; and 5) expand efforts to build academic relationships between faculty and departments at two- and four-year schools.

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